

THANKSGIVING

To set in order many reasons for thanksgiving to God for mercies either personal or national is like making an argument in favor of eating one's dinner, leaving out the paramount argument of hunger. If you are hungry, no other argument is needed, and if you are not hungry, no amount of argument will supply the deficiency. Thanksgiving is supposed to be the expression of a feeling or sentiment of the heart which we call gratitude, and this sentiment depends more upon the state of the heart than upon external circumstances. There are two people equally blessed. One is conscious of it in the form of gratitude, the other is not. The one needs no argument for thanksgiving, the other in all probability will be impervious to arguments. The first is sensible of his dependence upon God for everything, sensible that he does not deserve as much as he receives, and is correspondingly grateful and thankful, not once a year only, but every day and all the time. The enumeration of his blessings increases the fervency of his gratitude, but the root of the matter was in him before, and its fruit is the sincere thanksgiving which breaks from his lips in the form of words, in songs of praise, winging upward to the Father of Mercies the aspiration of a soul made beautiful by grace, and responsive to the great Father Love which broods over the world.

What is more beautiful than the gratitude of a child? We enhance our conception of this lovely trait by comparison with its opposite,—that hideous thing, that most repugnant and reprehensible and monstrous deformity,—the ingratitude of a child to parents who have done all for it. Sometimes the spectacle of this ingratitude, brazen, insensible, coarse and repulsive in its brutality, smites us like an accursed vision. But, as lovely as this is hideous, shines the sweet vision of gentle and thoughtful gratitude in a child, solacing like the touch of heavenly balm the cares and toils and anxieties of father and mother, who have spent themselves for the welfare of that child. This thoughtfulness of love is all the reward they ask for inestimable services which money could not buy, because there is not enough money in the world to represent their value. Precisely the same is our relation to our Heavenly Father, who has done for us and is doing for us what is of more worth than all the treasures of Egypt, and to whom we can make no return but that of love, and gratitude, and reverent thanksgiving. That is all the pay he asks. Love is the reward of love. For no other it seeks. But love, both in its essence and its sequence, is the ALL. Beside it there is no gift, for the all good, the all sacrifice, the all service, follows the all love. Thus has the Father proved to the world a thousand times along down the whole course of human history, and

thus are we brought face to face with the vast obligation, the endless debt to him who loves us with such an infinite and patient love, a debt which the more we pay the more we owe, and yet is not a burden but an infinite delight, the soul's inner refuge of rest and repose, secure from the turbulent billowing of external cares.

If we pause to enumerate the special reasons for this national Thanksgiving, we will have to give large space to the many evidences of astonishing and unprecedented material prosperity abounding on every hand, blessings of the field so vast that there is not room to contain them. The white mountains of cotton in the South glint against the golden mountains of corn in the West. Factory and furnace and mine and mill give labor and living to the millions of skilled artisans of the East. Everywhere there is a song of plenty and content; and the blessing fails not for that there are so many who do not remember, and do not look up, because the greatness of our God is manifest in this, that "he is kind to the unthankful and the evil." How can we grieve such a Father as this, by forgetting his benefits?

And how can we be content with the cheap payment of verbal thanks, unaccompanied with that sacrifice of love which costs us something, the returning to him of a portion of his own bounty, that his love may, by our means, be more and more shed abroad in the world, and in the hearts of the children of men. What cause of Christ is there within your reach halting and crippled for lack of your loving and liberal support? See ye to it. It awaits the proof of you that your thanksgiving is deeper than the lips, but that it bespeaks a sincerity and a worthiness, itself the guarantee of future blessings, expanding in that large and liberal way so characteristic of our Father in heaven, as our souls expand to receive them.

Remember God's poor. "Whensoever ye will, ye may do them good." And "he that giveth to the poor lendeth to the Lord, and he will repay him." The summer and the harvest is past, and their empty store houses compare piteously with your full barns, and the bleak winds of winter beat against their little ones not so warmly clothed as yours. Let us do unto them as we would wish that God should do unto us.

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